

Stephen Girard Country House Utility Building
Northwest corner Shunk and 21st Streets
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1082

HABS
PA
51-PHILA
226A-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
STEPHEN GIRARD COUNTRY HOUSE UTILITY BUILDING

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Address: Northwest corner Shunk and 21st Streets, in Girard Park, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: City of Philadelphia.

Present Use: Girard Park caretaker's equipment storage.

Significance: An interesting utility structure that combines numerous functions at three different levels, and was probably designed by Stephen Girard.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: (See Stephen Girard Country House - HABS No. PA-140).
2. Date of erection: Early-19th century.
3. Architect, etc: Probably built from design and specifications of Stephen Girard.
4. Original plans, construction: See architectural information.
5. Alterations: Wooden access stairs to smoke room added after 1901; small opening at ground level west facade bricked-in after 1901.
6. Important old views: D. J. Kennedy watercolor, dated May 1891, now in the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Vol. 6-48 large), shows two brick utility buildings with white fence between, and arching trellis on south side of southern utility structure.

B. Sources of Information:

Primary and unpublished sources: Stephen Girard Papers, Girard College, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania:

"Real Estate in Passyunk Township No. 1" (1798-1801).

"Real Estate in Passyunk Township No. 2" (c. 1801- c. 1830).

"Sundry Memoranda, 1803"

(The "Stephen Girard Papers in the possession of the Board of Trustees of the Estate of Stephen Girard, Deceased, Girard College, Philadelphia" are in the process of being microfilmed by the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.)

Prepared by William B. Bassett
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Northeast of Stephen Girard's Country House there are two brick buildings, whose common center-line is parallel to - and 35'-6" from - the east end of the main house. Each is 17' square (outside dimension) and has a wooden shingled hipped roof. The building on the north has been altered to accommodate modern lavatories; the one on the south, here named Stephen Girard Country House Utility Building, is the object of investigation in this report. It has three levels: (1) upper level--smoke room (floor line 4'-9 1/2" above grade); (2) central level--cooling room (floor line 3'-7" below grade); and (3) lower level--"root cellar" (floor line 16'-9" below grade).
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Detailed Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 17'-0" square.
2. Foundations: Random-size stone foundations below grade. "Root cellar" has circular stone walls (deepest penetration of measuring instrument 22").
3. Wall construction: Solid red brick bearing walls, common bond: 13" thick for smoke room; 18" thick for cooling room.
4. Vault and dome construction: Brick vault over cooling room (supporting floor of smoke room). Segmented brick dome over "root cellar" with circular oculus (20" in diameter) at peak of dome. Approximately eight segments varying from 2'-6" to 5'-0" in width at the springing line.

5. Bulkheads:

- a. West: Original access to smoke room removed and replaced by wooden stairs. Entrance to "root cellar" with granite cheeks is covered at present by the above-mentioned smoke room access stair.
- b. South: Entrance to cooling room has granite cheeks topped with granite coping.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Hipped wooden shingle roof with all four slopes meeting at common point. Shingles, 5 1/2" to weather, nailed to 1" x 3" wooden strips approximately 5 1/2" on center.
- b. Cornice: Wooden boxed cornice, molded top and bottom.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Upper level; one room with a 3'-0" x 6'-5" entrance opening in the west wall; 14'-10" square with unsurfaced brick walls and a brick fireplace on the east wall; the ceiling surface is composed of plaster applied to hand split lath nailed to the under side of the 1"x3" shingle nailer strips; vent holes in a diamond-shaped pattern are contained in the north wall, commencing 4' from the floor level; wrought iron hooks for the hanging of food stuffs are found on the (3' x 5") joists which span east-west and are spaced 3'-1" on center); the flooring is of exposed 4" x 8 1/2" brick placed in staggered rows running east-west.

Central Level: One room with brick vault running in a north-south direction, 7'-6" from floor level to high point of vault; the entrance is on the south side and access from ground level is by five concrete steps (11" tread - 9" riser); the vault and walls are plastered down to the floor line; a gradually sloping water trough--5"-7" deep and 33" wide--commencing in the southwest corner and ending in the southeast corner is adjacent to the west, north and east walls; the circular oculus of the ice room dome below occurs in the exact center of the room; both the floor and the water trough are surfaced with 11" x 2" marble tiles set in concrete.

Lower level: One room, circular in plan with an overall height of 11'-9" and a diameter of 13'-9 1/2"; the walls are of random size rubble stone, with the springing line of the brick segmented dome occurring 9'-4"

from the floor line; a small arched opening (15" wide and 17 1/2" to the peak of the arch) leading to a chute, the purpose of which is uncertain, occurs on the north side of the room and springs from the springing line of the dome ceiling; major access to the lower level is through a steep chute-like opening on the west. (No evidence of a permanent stair exists and it is thought that ladders must have been used.)

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The Stephen Girard Country House is located in the Girard Estate Park, a city park, 21st and Shunk Streets, South Philadelphia. The main entry of the house itself faces north. Site area--153,400 square feet. The two utility buildings are 27 feet northeast of the main structure.
2. Enclosures: Low hedges surround the park, entrances to the park are flanked by stone posts.
3. Driveways: Concrete driveway surrounds the two utility structures.
4. Landscaping: The entire park is planted with random-placed shade trees.

Prepared by John D. Milner, Architect
National Park Service
Summer 1962